



*Advancing health and wellness  
through information technology*

# AzHeC Briefing Paper: History, Direction and Accomplishments

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## *What is Arizona Health-e Connection (AzHeC)?*

**Vision.** Arizona Health-e Connection will be the international model for facilitation of Health Information Infrastructure development and implementation

**Mission.** To facilitate the design and implementation of integrated statewide Health Information Technology and Health Information Exchange that supports the information needs of consumers, health plans, policymakers, providers, purchasers, and researchers to reduce healthcare costs, improve patient safety, and improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare and public health in Arizona.

Established in January 2007, Arizona Health-e Connection (AzHeC) is a statewide non-profit organization founded and designed to lead Arizona's establishment of health information infrastructure (HII), which includes support of health information exchange (HIE) and adoption of health information technology (HIT), such as clinician office electronic health records. Arizona Health-e Connection is neither a regional health information organization (RHIO) nor an information exchange, but instead provides strategic direction for the establishment of successful health information infrastructure in Arizona through:

- Serving as an educator and statewide clearinghouse for information
- Researching and developing statewide policies, and model legal agreements
- Supporting health information exchange and provider and consumer adoption of health information technology

## *Is Arizona Health-e Connection performing Health Information Exchange (HIE)?*

No – not at this time. From the time the Roadmap was established, it was determined that the act of exchanging health information would be done by Regional Health Information Organizations (RHIOs) throughout Arizona, and only when it was necessary would statewide services be delivered by a statewide organization, potentially AzHeC. For this reason, AzHeC has been supporting the development of RHIOs, such as the Southern Arizona Health Information Exchange (SAHIE), and supporting GITA's role in funding rural community planning efforts to investigate and establish RHIOs. When the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) won a CMS grant to help Medicaid participate in the Roadmap, it was unclear whether AHCCCS would support regional efforts (as suggested in the Roadmap), or develop its own infrastructure. In mid-2008, the AzHeC Board began to anticipate that a statewide infrastructure might provide both interoperability and financial efficiencies, and chose to closely watch the longest-developing Arizona RHIO, SAHIE. If SAHIE - which had developed a value-based business plan, selected technical services based on community business needs, and performed a rigorous vendor selection – succeeded in providing services through a sustainable business model in its initial three-county region, then discussions would ensue about AzHeC working with SAHIE to expand services throughout Arizona, offering the SAHIE technical solution as an option to nascent RHIOs. AzHeC would consider taking on the governance of such a statewide HIE solution.

In late 2008, AHCCCS deployed their own HIE solution in the Phoenix area, thus creating a second RHIO (the first operational). Meanwhile CAPAZ-Mex, in Yuma, also began implementation of a shared continuity of care record (CCR), and is using it to seed a Yuma-based RHIO effort. Thus, AzHeC is not performing HIE, but should statewide services need to be deployed by a non-governmental body (as opposed to provider directories, that may best be provided by licensing boards or agencies), the AzHeC Board stands ready to consider those opportunities. Unless or until a need to govern statewide services becomes

available, AzHeC will focus on continuing its strategic direction of education, policy development, and support of HIT adoption and HIE initiatives to ensure statewide interoperability.

### *History*

Arizona Health-e Connection grew out of an August 2005 gubernatorial executive order and the subsequent work of hundreds of Arizona individuals and institutions. Within six months of the executive order, a blue-ribbon steering committee, working with eHealth Initiative (eHI) of Washington D.C., and Arizona volunteers, delivered a five-year plan - known as "The Roadmap" - for establishing the state's e-health infrastructure.

The Roadmap called for development of infrastructure on a regional basis, with provision of shared infrastructure components as necessary by a statewide non-profit organization. This statewide entity would also provide leadership for educating Arizonans on e-health, developing statewide policies and agreements, and promoting clinicians' adoption of electronic medical records, e-prescribing, and other health information technology.

Arizona Health-e Connection was founded in January 2007 to provide this leadership, and chose Brad Tritle as its first executive director in September 2007. It currently maintains offices within the Arizona Medical Association (ArMA) building in Phoenix. Educational efforts include its annual Western States Health-e Connection Summit & Trade Show in the spring of each year, which provides an overview of national, state, and regional e-health activities to health care, government and business leaders, as well as consumers.

### *National Attention*

Arizona Health-e Connection has gained attention nationally for its early leadership, focus on action, and the cooperation of a broad base of stakeholders.

"Arizona gets it," Robert Kolodner, former head of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, told stakeholders at the 2007 Summit. "You have in fact embodied that idea of fostering collaborations and bringing to the table a wide spectrum of stakeholders, all of whom have to be involved."

The Council of State Governments, which supports policy development efforts of the three branches of government in all fifty states, awarded Arizona Health-e Connection its coveted Innovations Award, not only for its unique and effective approach, but for its ability to be duplicated by other states.

In March 2008, HHS released its report on the role of states in establishing health information infrastructure, entitled *State Level Health Information Exchange*. Arizona, together with other states, participated in the HHS study, presenting at meetings and comparing approaches. The report's findings recommend that other states follow the steps taken by Arizona.

Harvard Business School has published a case study on Arizona Health-e Connection, *Modern Healthcare* featured it as a cover story, and additional media coverage ranges from the *New York Times* to *Healthcare IT News*, the *Arizona Republic*, and others. According to Janet Marchibroda, former CEO of eHealth Initiative, other states continue to follow Arizona's model of stakeholder cooperation.

### *First Initiatives—2007-2008*

Arizona's early identification of privacy and security concerns as a major concern in the establishment of health information exchange led to the state being an early recipient of a federal grant to participate in the Health Information Security and Privacy Collaborative (HISPC), funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ) and overseen by the Office of the National Coordinator (ONC) within HHS. Due to Arizona's results-oriented approach, it has received several additional rounds of funding, co-chairing the multi-state collaborative to address the sharing of electronic health information across state lines, and serving on the steering committee for the national project.

Arizona's stakeholder cooperation has also attracted the attention of the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the HHS agency which administers both programs, in its efforts to transform Medicaid. In early 2007, CMS awarded Arizona's Medicaid agency, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) an \$11.7 million grant to build a health information exchange and utility, in order for Medicaid to participate in the Roadmap implementation. An additional CMS grant of \$4.4 million was awarded in late 2007, to build a clinical decision support toolbox in conjunction with the health information exchange and utility. AHCCCS leadership chairs CMS' multi-state collaborative committees on both health information exchange and electronic health records.

### *Stakeholder Cooperation and a Ground-Up Approach*

The stakeholder cooperation of existing and future Arizona Health-e Connection members is necessary to establish statewide implementation and interoperability. Without individual provider adoption of electronic health records, and local and regional stakeholder education and participation, a statewide effort cannot succeed. In 2006, Arizona established the Rural Health Information Technology Adoption (RHITA) program within the Government Information Technology Agency (GITA) to fund rural implementation of the Roadmap recommendations. In 2007, seven grants were provided to rural hospitals, community health centers, and behavioral healthcare providers. The 2008 monies were applied to facilitate further HIE and HIT efforts in rural Arizona. Across the country, as in Arizona, stakeholder discussions have led to the discovery that local providers are more likely to buy in to a project when they have participated early in the project's development.

AzHeC is working closely with regional stakeholders and initiatives, such as the Southern Arizona Health Information Exchange (SAHIE) and the Arizona Medical Information Exchange (AMIE) along with individual meetings with organizations in rural and metro Arizona, to further collaboration, and create continuity. It has also established a Council of Initiatives, which is a forum for initiatives and programs from around Arizona to exchange ideas and leverage resources. It was established in mid-2009 that the Council of Initiatives would also provide the core direction in choosing the types of policies that need to be implemented to ensure statewide interoperability.

As eHealth Initiative's former CEO Janet Marchibroda states, "Healthcare is really local. Each state and each community has individual needs and wants to meet."

### *What are AzHeC's major accomplishments?*

AzHeC routinely defines itself as a convener, collaborator, and communicator. These roles can only be accomplished by establishing trust with Arizona providers, consumers and other stakeholders. The existence and maintenance of AzHeC as multi-stakeholder organization, with all stakeholders interested in accomplishing the same ends of HIT adoption and interoperability, would alone be a major accomplishment for a state. AzHeC has not only

accomplished the challenge of maintaining a multi-stakeholder organization, but has achieved the following:

**Education.** AzHeC has educated hundreds of physicians, nurses, physician assistants, and pharmacists on health information exchange, electronic health records, electronic prescribing, personal health records and platforms, and privacy and security. When adding the number of non-clinician stakeholders, such as consumers, health plans, health information technologists, government agency workers, and others, it is clear that through its unique website, annual summit, group presentations (often with CME or CE credit), literature, radio, TV and newspaper presence, AzHeC has educated thousands of Arizonans on the features and benefits of health information technology. This was accomplished while also instilling faith and trust that AzHeC has and will always take the necessary steps to ensure privacy and security. AzHeC has also played a role in educating those outside Arizona, through national presentations for the State Alliance for e-Health, State Level HIE Forum, Case Management Society of America, Council of State Governments, the National Council of Prescription Drug Programs (NCPDP), eHealth Initiative, the Health Information Management and Systems Society (HIMSS), and the Center for Business Intelligence.

**Policy Development.** The AzHeC Executive Committee has served as the Arizona Steering Committee for adoption of all reports and policies created by Arizona's Privacy and Security Projects under the federal Health Information Security and Privacy Collaborative (HISPC). This includes the identification of business practices and state laws that inhibit health information exchange, development of new state policies and laws, including participation agreements for health information exchange, and then outside of HISPC has helped to apply these agreements to specific HIE implementations. The AzHeC Legal Committee and Clinical Technical Committee, and subcommittees, have played key roles in policy development. Future policy development work will rely heavily on AzHeC's Council of Initiatives.

**Initiative Support.** AzHeC has either led or supported a variety of initiatives throughout Arizona, when a neutral, trusted third party or subject matter expert was needed. This includes establishing and leading Arizona's five-year, statewide electronic prescribing initiative (EAzRx), and supporting SAHIE, AMIE, PACeHR (web-based EHR purchasing collaborative), rural community adoption of HIT and HIE (GITA RHITA program), HISPC, and the Medicare Personal Health Record Choice Pilot Program (at the request of the regional CMS administrator). AzHeC supports these initiatives as needed, requested, or deemed appropriate by the Board.

**Trust.** AzHeC staff has adopted the motto of "Whoever can be trusted with little, can be trusted with much." In all that AzHeC staff executes, they strive to maintain the highest integrity and standards of excellence, knowing that as the future of interoperability evolves, the organization may be asked to take on even greater responsibilities. It is believed that delivering on smaller promises, and creating an inclusive atmosphere, have established such trust with health care stakeholders throughout Arizona. Should greater opportunities present themselves, not only is AzHeC able to scale, but it will do so with Arizonans' trust and support. The value of trust as it relates to the handling of health information cannot be overstated.

#### *How can I learn more, or become involved?*

Visit [www.azhec.org](http://www.azhec.org) to communicate with and join the organization, attend our annual Summit & Trade Show as well as other exciting educational events, and sign up for email newsletters! The AzHeC Speakers Bureau can also provide speakers for industry, community, or organizational events.